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C O N F I D E N T I A L LUANDA 000038

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SUBJECT: (C) MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION IN DENIAL OVER EU
AVIATION BAN

REF: 08 LUANDA 908

Classified By: Ambassador Dan Mozena for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a January 13 meeting with Ambassador Mozena, Minister of Transport Augusto da Silva Tomas showed himself to be in complete denial over the seriousness of the EU ban on Angolan airlines and his country's nonconformity with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards and failed to recognize the significant shortcomings of both the national airline, TAAG, and the civil aviation authority, INAVIC. He outlined the GRA's plans for restructuring both, confidently stated that both TAAG and INAVIC would pass EU and ICAO muster by June. Tomas said Luanda's airport would be ready to pass a Transportation and Security Administration (TSA) inspection by December of this year. He enthusiastically welcomed Delta Airlines' plans to start service to Luanda from the U.S. (via Cape Verde), and said our two countries should begin negotiations on a bilateral civil aviation agreement and on allowing TAAG to fly to the U.S. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) During his January 13 meeting with Ambassador Mozena, Minister Tomas described GRA plans to restructure TAAG with the ultimate goal of creating a world-class and profitable airline. He said the GRA was working with U.S. and Portuguese consultants to restructure INAVIC and make it a "strong authority." Tomas appeared dismissive of TAAG's deficient air worthiness regime and INAVIC's nonconformity with ICAO standards, focusing most of his attention, instead, on his descriptions of TAAG's future as a global carrier. He noted that the current focus was to improve TAAG operations to get it off the EU "blacklist" and "to respond to EU and ICAO criticisms relating to safety and security." He described GRA plans to refurbish Luanda's airport by improving radar coverage, IT infrastructure, and passenger terminals stating, "In the next twelve months we will do more for that airport than has been done in the last fifty years." He confidently stated that both TAAG and INAVIC will be ICAO compliant by June and that Luanda's airport would be up to TSA standards by this December. Tomas enthusiastically welcomed Delta Airlines' plans to start in June twice-weekly service from Atlanta to Luanda (via Cape Verde) and agreed to meet with its delegation on January 21, to explore this possibility.

¶3. (C) During the course of the conversation, Tomas made clear that he viewed the EU ban as an insult to Angola rather than a prudent reaction to Angola's civil aviation shortcomings. He offered that, as a result of the EU ban, TAAG was opening routes to Asia and the Mid East and was seeking international partners to add even more routes and value to TAAG's operations. He several times referred to the fact that TAAG's 777 were new and "not in need of repair," and that TAAG had "wonderful U.S.-trained pilots." (NOTE: TAAG had to use Boeing pilots to transport their new 777s from Washington State to Angola, as it did not have any

pilots certified to fly extended twin engine operations over the ocean.) Tomas twice referred to the ban in personal terms complaining that the EU could "come to our house, and yet Angola could not come to theirs due to security issues" and that the ban was like "having a woman you refused to marry." He implied that Angola should reciprocate against EU carriers, and defended Angola civil aviation laws as superior to ICAO minimums.

14. (C) In response, the Ambassador explained that the issues surrounding INAVIC and TAAG were of great concern, and that while the U.S. would like to have U.S.-Angola direct flights by TAAG, it was important to first regularize INAVIC and get TAAG off the EU blacklist. He clarified that the EU and ICAO issues were safety related, and that they were not personal, but that all countries had to fulfill ICAO obligations. The Ambassador acknowledged that Angola had good civil aviation laws, but clarified that the issue was INAVIC's complete lack of enforcement of those laws. He urged the Minister to go to Montreal to learn firsthand what Angola needed to do to meet ICAO standards. The Minister said he would visit Montreal and suggested it could be part of a multi-country visit (including Belgium, France, and the U.S.) to drum up a foreign partner for TAAG and to sign civil aviation accords like the one Angola recently signed with China. The Ambassador reiterated that the EU ban was very serious and that Angola needed to be serious in satisfying full ICAO standards. Tomas noted that the U.S. was powerful and had a great deal of influence, and said he hoped the U.S. could use that influence to help Angola with ICAO. The Ambassador made clear that this was "not an issue of short-cuts, or negotiations, or phone calls from powerful people," but that "everyone must follow the rules."

15. (C) COMMENT: Unless the GRA takes its ICAO obligations seriously and stops viewing the EU blacklisting as political game-making, Angola is on track toward becoming an international aviation pariah. The Ambassador sought this meeting with Tomas in part due to concerns that the Minister was being told (by his staff and a Portuguese aviation advisor) that some simple short-cuts and political fixes would result in a lifting of the EU ban. Tomas's views on aviation clearly indicate the Minister is not yet appreciative of the steps Angola must take to deal with this issue. Post will continue to press the GRA to take the necessary actions to come into compliance with its ICAO obligations.

MOZENA